

Nick Taggart: Installation view of north and east walls, 1991; at Fahey/Klein.

them into allegorical tableaux and, by means of darkroom manipulations—shading, texturizing, distressing—gives the imagery an antique look imbued with the aura of art.

The most arresting picture here was that of a severed head in a shallow, bloodstained white bowl. (Witkin has been making photos at morgues and anatomy labs.) A young man's head with short, greasy, spiky hair and a bit of grizzled beard is seen in profile with eyes closed and mouth slightly open; the face looks peaceful, as though asleep. This is not a coldly documentary photograph. The light is soft and shadowy, and there's something ceremonial about the centered composition; you think, inevitably, of the head of John the Baptist. The image is both fascinating and revolting.

Similarly horrifying is *Feast of Fools*, a still life in which hacked-off hands and feet are arranged around the corpse of a newborn baby that rests among grapes and pomegranates. The picture is a form of *vanitas*—a meditation on mortality.

Not all the photographs in the show were of such grisly subjects. One thoroughly entrancing image presents a person who appears, from the waist up, to be a very beautiful woman (fully developed breasts included), but who is equipped down below with decidedly manly genitalia. He/she stands next to a little dog placed on a table. Remarkably, this person embodies androgyny with elegant, somewhat ethereal dignity. In a more playfully theatrical mood is *Daphne and Apollo*. The pursuer is a small goat whose erection was added by crudely scratching the photographic negative; the quarry is a naked blonde dwarf who

geometric form and the white surface beneath it, down to a bedrock black underpainting. The final image is deeply textured by the many strata of gouging and painting it covers.

As depictions of particular physical attitudes, the paintings are deft and broad-ranging in their references. The sketchy figures, fast and graceful, seem indebted to Cy Twombly and Abstract Expressionism. Chase's block figures bring to mind the animated geometry of Joel Shapiro's recent sculpture. And the range of postures in Chase's paintings, like their titles, reinforces an impression that she is engaged in her own variant of classical figure study: there are two versions of *Icarus*, one of the *Dying Slave* and one of *Oedipus*.

These paintings are conceptually complex. Chase sets up an interaction among figures visibly born of manual gesture (the abstracted sketches), implicitly antecedent ones (the original blocky figures) and logically deduced ones (the final, reduced, geometric forms). To put it like this is to conjure up a forbiddingly schematic sort of painting. Without question, spontaneity has a circumscribed, if vivid, life in Chase's new work. But it is precisely the tension between sense and sensibility that animates these paintings. Though Chase's early work kept such concerns well submerged, hindsight suggests they fueled her imagery all long.

—Nancy Princenthal

LOS ANGELES

Nick Taggart at Fahey/Klein

Nick Taggart sees the same pri-

mal and iconic shapes everywhere he looks, in culture and in nature. This kind of discovery seems to be cyclical in the art world, and Taggart recalls its last go-around, the forms of Earth Art, in his recent installation of paintings. He sees the shapes writ small and writ large, so he adopts as his format not a grand summary image but an accumulation of examples—26 black-and-white oils (all but one diminutive)—that add up to something large.

The installation in Fahey/Klein's smaller gallery diagramed Taggart's thesis on three walls. On the north wall were 17 rectangular, circular, oval and square canvases, some as small as 5 by 7 inches, painted with representations of nebulas, spiral clouds, coronas, eggs, seeds and bits of landscape. On the south wall were seven pairs of equally tiny paintings; these sets of vertical and horizontal canvases depict natural phenomena and landscapes similar to the single paintings but most often juxtaposed with images of art works, among them Brancusi's *Endless Column*, De Maria's *Lightning Field* and Holt's *Sun Tunnels*. The pairings take on a sexual cast when they oppose linear and circular forms so as to suggest genital coupling or the schematized union of sperm and ovum. Bridging these contrasting groups of paintings was a large vertical diptych, *Push* (115¾ by 49¼ inches), on the gallery's east wall. At its top is a sort of *Starry Night* spiral. Below is a depiction of a notch in an austere landscape with a person lying belly-down in it, making a shallow "v" with his or her body. All the paintings are straightforward and rather photographic views, but the artist's technique is perfunctorily realistic rather than exacting.

Taggart suggests, in a typed statement, that the symbolism of the north canvases could be taken as female, the south as male and the central canvas as an interaction of the two. Put so baldly, the idea sounds facile, yet no more so than any profound generality shorn of its individual complexities would be. In any case, the installation works. The success is partly in the details, which provide the complexities. One notices that the natural spirals and ovoids occupy canvases of varied shapes that correspond closely to the images they contain. The pairings of art and nature on the opposite wall, by contrast, are presented solely in

canvases of rectangular format—the shapes and proportions of books and pictures—and often consist of mere bands of imagery on otherwise featureless canvases. These cropped depictions appear to derive from photographic representations; by not matching the measurement of the canvases to the measurement of the reproductions, Taggart makes the imagery stand out as artificial in comparison with the seamless renderings of natural phenomena. The imagery throughout the installation is archetypal and thus familiar, but this presentation makes us see the familiar anew.

Taggart came to L.A. from Britain in 1977. He teaches at Otis, has been exhibiting steadily through the '80s and recently was featured in a GAP clothing ad that was included in his biographical material at the gallery.

—Janet Koplos

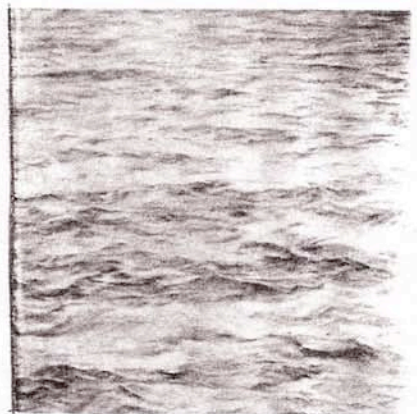
SAN FRANCISCO

May Sun at Capp Street Project

Sun Yat-Sen is revered by his countrymen, communist and



Gabrielle Bakker: *Still Life*, 1990, oil on canvas, 72 by 96 inches; at Mincher/Wilcox.



Diane Andrews Hall: *Silver Light*, 1990, oil and pencil on canvas, 65 by 70 inches; at Mincher/Wilcox.